

15. WATER ACQUISITION STRATEGY ADOPTED BY GOLDFINCH (*CARDUELIS CARDUELIS*)

Water is an important requisite for survival. The daily intake of water depends on a wide range of environmental and physiological variables (Welty 1982). Grain eating birds gain little water from their food and are said to have the greatest need for water (Dorst 1974). Goldfinch are granivorous and mainly feed on seeds, especially of thistles (*Carduus* spp.), sunflower (*Helianthus*) and zinnia (*Zinnia*) in hill station gardens, and seeds of the chenar tree (*Platanus orientalis*) in Kashmir (Ali & Ripley 1983). Thus it has to fulfill its water requirements by drinking water regularly.

Here I report my observation of goldfinch eating snow. They were seen on February 24, 1997, at 2800 m above msl, on the southern boundary of the Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary on (30° 30' N & 79° 15' E). The Sanctuary remained snowbound from January to March. Goldfinch have been reported to be fairly

common in the study area (Green 1985). Seven goldfinches were observed on a rhododendron (*Rhododendron arboreum*) tree near a frozen *nalla* (forest stream). They were seen feeding on the seeds of a dead thorny herb (*Mollina longifolia*) growing nearby. After a while, a few birds were observed chipping off the snow on the ground with their beaks and then consuming it. This method of consuming water in frozen form has been reported in other species such as starlings (Allard 1934), pine siskins (*Carduelis pinus*), redwing (*Turdus iliacus*), blackbird (*Turdus merula*) and Bohemian waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulus*) (Wolfe 1997).

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16. OCCURRENCE OF DRACO OR FLYING LIZARD *DRACO DUSSUMIERI* IN CHITTOOR DISTRICT, ANDHRA PRADESH

Two days (August 28-29, 1999) of the first Bird Banding Training Programme for the 1999-2000 season, organised by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), were spent in Talakona Reserve Forest (13°49' N, 79° 13' E), in the Palkonda hills of the Eastern Ghats complex. Talakona is c. 70 km northwest of Tirupati town in Chittoor dist., Andhra Pradesh. It is part of the 506 sq. km Sri Venkateshwara National

Park. Within Talakona RF is a 5 sq. km sacred grove around the temple of Siddeswaraswamy. A perennial stream, *Bugga Vāgu*, plunges 30 m, forming the Talakona or Papanāsanam Waterfall, into a narrow valley supporting a belt of semi-evergreen riparian vegetation, along a length of at least 3 km. which is the distance from the temple to the waterfall (Anon., 1996).

While returning from an early morning

birdwatching trek to the waterfall on August 28, 1999, Aasheesh Pittie sensed a movement among the trees growing from the valley on his left and on looking saw a small object floating towards the trunk of a tree. He wondered whether it was a flying lizard. The orange coloured patagium was seen clearly. Before he could focus his binoculars on it, the lizard merged into the bark of the tree. A few steps ahead, S. Balachandran pointed out a male draco *Draco dussumieri* Dum. & Bibr., on the vertical trunk of an unidentified tree (*Mangifera indica?*), that grew from the valley below. The lizard was displaying by erecting a bright yellow flap of skin from the region of its throat. But for this flash of brilliant colour, it would have been difficult to spot the draco against the bark of the tree, as its camouflage was perfect. We spotted two more lizards while we stood there. One was on another tree about 5 m away and the other was on the same tree as the first lizard. All three were at eye level and we had a good view of them. Three to four lizards were also seen next morning in the same area. They were photographed and videographed by other members of the group.

According to Daniel (1983) *Draco dussumieri* has a distribution that is "restricted

to southwest India from the hills near Kanyakumari to the forests of Goa...All other species of the genus *Draco* occur in the eastern Himalayas and further east." Though the lizard is listed in the publicity pamphlet on Sri Venkateshwara NP, brought out by the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department, this is the first documentation of its occurrence in the Eastern Ghats, an interesting record for biogeographers of the Oriental Region.

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17. OCCURRENCE OF YELLOW-BELLIED *PELAMIS PLATURUS* (LINN.),
 REPTILIA : HYDROPHIDAE, IN COASTAL WATERS OFF DIGHA,
 WEST BENGAL

A specimen of the yellow-bellied sea snake *Pelamis platurus* (Linn.) of 235 mm total length was caught in a dragnet by fishermen off Digha, West Bengal, from the Bay of Bengal on September 12, 1998. Although this species is common in the Indo-Australian seas (Smith, 1943), there is no mention of this species in the account of Ahmed & Dasgupta (1992), who

listed the reptiles of West Bengal. A brief description of the specimen is given below:

Pelamis platurus (Linn.)
Anguis platurus Linn. 1766,
Syst. Nat. ed. 12, p. 391.

Material examined: New Digha Ghat, West Bengal, India; 12.ix.1998; coll. S. Mitra &